

Woodstock Conservation Commission Development Review Committee Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2016

Attendance: Lee Wesler, Maura Robie, Jean Pillo

RE: Discussion on Open Space Subdivision Regulations

A vast percentage of land in Woodstock drains to streams that are upstream of public drinking water surface water intakes (Putnam, Willimantic and Southbridge). In the State of Connecticut Plan of Conservation and Development 2013 - 2018, the majority of the town is considered an important conservation area. In the Connecticut Comprehensive Open Space Plan 2014 - 2019 (Greenplan), the statewide goal for committed open space is 21%. While the Woodstock Open Space Acquisition and Agriculture Preservation Committee and local land trusts have worked diligently to preserve land, and land has also be preserved as open space as open space set asides as a result of the Woodstock Subdivision Regulations, Woodstock still remains significantly below the statewide open space goal. The open space inventory is under revision and verification, so the exact numbers are not available, but a reasonable estimate is that less than 15% of the land in Woodstock is protected open space.

The Woodstock Conservation Commission DRC met to discuss the pros and cons of the existing open space subdivision regulations. As a result of these regulations, the town has acquired land that is available to be developed for passive and active recreation. A good example is the town park with a developed hiking trail associated with the Senexet Village development in South Woodstock. Wooded open space properties not only provide for aquifer recharge areas in a town where the majority of homes are served by private wells, but also can be managed for sustainable timber harvesting. The Conservation Commission is making arrangements with the Yale School of Forestry to develop a forest management plan that includes a timber harvest schedule for the Park Woods Farm subdivision in North Woodstock. The New Roxbury Land Trust and the Wyndham Land Trust have both acquired land as a result of the current subdivision regulations. While there is no tax revenue generated by town owned open space, there are limited expenses on those parcels, and in some cases, the opportunity to generate income for the town.

The Conservation Commission recognizes that the open space acquired from all open space subdivision are not equal quality.

- While open space owned by private landowners but held in a conservation easement in favor of the town will result in land that generates tax revenue, small, scattered open space properties are burden to an all-volunteer commission when it comes to monitoring the conservation easements to assure they are not being encroached on.
- The Conservation Commission annual budget does not allow hiring someone to monitor the easements on an annual bases.
- It has also been a problem that the boundaries in many cases on the open space set asides have not been marked prior to the subdivision parcels being sold for development.
- While the Conservation Commission is permitted to review subdivision applications for compatibility with A Plan of Open Space and Conservation, once the subdivision is approved by the PZC, there is a communication breakdown as to when the land use change is officially recorded in the land records. In many cases, subdivision approved by the PZC expired and the open space was never finalized. This makes it difficult to maintain the official open space inventory.

The Conservation Commission supports the continuance of the open space subdivision regulations as a requirement for land being subdivided. We also support that a fee in lieu of open space be considered in certain cases. We respectfully request that the Conservation Commission always be consulted prior to a fee in lieu of open space be approved.

Meeting minutes respectfully prepared by Jean Pillo